

Even Paris is Startled

Respect for Things Sacred and Religious Outraged by Blasphemous Scenes Enacted in a Church in M. Bataille's New Play

Andre Brule, Who Plays the Leading Part of "Don Juan" in the Piece. The Costume Is of Silver Brocade, and This Has Been Objected To By the Critics as Making the Old Rouse Look Like a Glistening Fish.

THE religious world of Paris, both Catholic and Protestant, is shocked beyond measure at the extraordinary daring of Henry Bataille's new play, "L'Homme a la Rose"—the Man with the Rose. It is not that the costumes are too scant nor because the lines of the play are unfit for public utterance, nor because the episodes and scenes are exceptionally wicked or disgusting.

The outcry of protest and indignation against their outraged feelings is because of the astonishing lack of respect for things sacred and religious.

The famous playwright chose the historic Don Juan for his theme. No objection would have been raised against selecting this notorious rouse as his hero. But when the playwright chooses the sacred precincts of a cathedral as a place to develop and exploit all this cynical, worldly jesting and ribaldry he has gone a little further than even a person without any professed religious scruples can accept without a shudder.

When a Bataille play is announced in Paris it is looked upon as a great event in the theatrical world. When Bataille gave out that he would produce "L'Homme a la Rose" he surrounded the piece with so much mystery and secrecy, not even intimating what the subject of the play would be—which could never be surmised from the title itself—and promised such surprises that all Paris was on the qui vive. When the general rehearsal was announced there was a rush to obtain tickets, which on such occasions are invitation affairs.

But the favored few who were to witness the first production of his new play had been chosen by the author himself, who, claiming to himself the prerogative that comes to genius to do things in some extraordinary way, insisted upon having the whole house turned over to him to invite whom he wished. When this was known the demand for tickets became greater, and as much as a thousand francs a seat was offered. The interest in the play was as great as that shown in the first production of Rostand's "Chantecler," though more restricted and not international.

A magnificent sight was presented when the audience gathered for the first night of "L'Homme a la Rose." The Theatre de Paris was crowded with the elite of Paris, of the worlds of society, letters, politics, art and the stage. A great author would be sitting next to a renowned actress, who would be touching elbows with some famous society leader. The house was a veritable exposition of the people who are making Paris what it is in art, literature and science.

Andre Brule appeared in the principal role and it was discovered that the play was written on Don Juan and his historic love adventures.

Bataille is perhaps original in having taken the theme of the great lover, Don Juan, for the theme of his play. The play opens at a time when Don Juan, steeped in licentiousness and dissipation, tired of his many love affairs, asks a friend to take his place in a rendezvous which he has made with a duchess. The friend accepts and the frivolous wife is awaiting her adventure with the noted lover on her balcony.

The ducal husband returns unexpectedly and kills the supposed Don Juan, disfigure-

ing his face with his sword. Don Juan, seeing the incident and the possibilities of it, enters the house unseen and places in the pocket of the dead man his memoirs, upon which he has been working. The finding of these identify the disfigured man as the noted Don Juan, and a great funeral is arranged for him, his memoirs being interred with the body of the supposed Don Juan.

The second act is placed in the Cathedral of Seville. It is a wonderful setting; the great pillars of the church, ornamented with figures of the Virgin, the golden grill with the chancel behind it, the fonts of holy water, the candles burning everywhere, the confessionals and small chapels reproduced with a fidelity much too exact to please those who have a reverence for holy things. And this is the setting in which Bataille chose to unfold the super-worldly philosophies of a wicked Don Juan!

Don Juan has come to attend the last obsequies over his supposed body. In attending his own funeral he brought his friend with him. All the magnificence and pomp of a Spanish Catholic funeral are faithfully portrayed. The pageant of the priests and bishops, with their acolytes, Franciscan monks in sombre robes contrasting strongly with the wonderfully costumed major-domos; the coffin, black and foreboding, illumined with numerous candles, carried on the shoulders of four penitents, gowned, as is the custom of the persons who perform this service, in brilliant red, with mask-like hoods covering the entire head, holes for the eyes intensifying the gruesome effect; the mourners following, each costume a work of art designed from the old Spanish masters—all these give a realistic effect that caused a genuine emotion, for it was difficult to appreciate you were not actually attending Don Juan's funeral yourself as you sat in the audience.

As the Mass proceeds Don Juan and his friend comment upon the mourners who are present. They watch them come and go as they pay their last respects to the dead debauchee. They see many of the former lovers of Don Juan enter—some grief-stricken, others indifferent and others in seeming satisfaction.

Don Juan, from behind a pillar of the church, recounts his adventures as they are recalled to him by seeing his former loves. He does not spare his victims. He ridicules the husbands whose wives he had stolen as they pass by and jeers at the frailty of women. He flays them all, without respect, with his cynical philosophy.

But his overruling vanity and egotism get the best of him, and he desires to know what these old loves now think of now that he is dead and gone. He sends his friend to intercept them as they come from the service to question them. He remains in the background listening to what they have to say.

He points out one with whom he had been in love for ten years, but had parted with five years before, and sends his friend to speak with her. He asks her if she would like some little souvenir of Don Juan, as he was his friend and would obtain it for her. She is indifferent and merely thanks him. She is turning to leave. Don Juan urges his friend to detain her, so he asks her if she



Mlle. Monna Delza in Her Very Striking Costume of Cloth of Silver Trimmed in Silver Lace.

would like to see a man who resembles her former lover greatly.

She turns, without emotion, and asks where he is. The friend points to the real Don Juan standing there, but the woman merely smiles and says he is but a poor and unworthy imitation of the man she once loved, and, bowing, leaves the church. Don Juan is disquieted. He takes a mirror from his pocket and looks at himself, saying to his friend that it is not possible that he could have changed so in five years.

A young girl enters and commences her devotions before the confessional. Don Juan is attracted by her. He turns to his friend and tells him he has won queens in five minutes and that he would win the sixteen-year-old girl in two. He approaches her, first excusing himself, saying for her to continue her prayers as he is not in a hurry. She accepts his excuses and continues her devotions more earnestly, trying to avoid him. He persists, wicked and accomplished as he is in all the graces that win women's hearts and so apt in all the snares that beguile women.

She is annoyed and afraid and rushes for protection into the confessional, where Don Juan follows, first asking his friend to sing a serenade, which he does, using his

sword as a mock guitar.

The girl comes out of the confessional, trying to disengage herself from Don Juan's embraces, calling him vile names. She finally frees herself, and as she goes out the door hurls back at him an epithet in which he is referred to as "old," and this being told—he was old was the hardest thing for Don Juan to bear. Again out comes his mirror and he confesses to his friend that he has received the first rebuff of his life.

He is worried and philosophizes on age, but the appearance of a common girl of the street, who rushes into the church, mad with grief and in bitter anguish throws herself down upon the stone floor in an agony of sorrow, attracts him. Don Juan regards her, but does not know her. His friend cannot enlighten him either. Who can this grief-stricken woman be? He covers his face with his cloak and approaches her, asking if all these tears were for Don Juan. When she replies affirmatively he is more perplexed.

He couldn't remember her. When he asked her if she had seen Don Juan often, she replied only once at a fete in Seville, but for fifteen years he had ever been in her heart and mind. This flattered Don Juan, after the rebuffs he had received, and he revealed himself to her. She recognized him at once and, screaming with fear, sought to run away. Don Juan held her hand long enough to make a rendezvous for that evening in the market place!

Don Juan is pleased. He boasts to his friend that time had not changed him as he thought when a woman who had seen him once remembered him with love for fifteen years! This was his consolation!

His first mistress, old and pompous, comes out, supported by her ladies. As

Mlle. Eve Francis in Her Part in the Play.

she passes he scatters roses in her path, and when she has gone out he spits, in disgust, at her feet. A poet friend comes from the services apotheosizing Don Juan, saying that he will make a famous book and play of his history. Don Juan's vanity is fed, and when the poet leaves he is in a quandary whether to remain dead as a great man or to take the chance, in having a resurrection, of outliving his greatness.

He tosses a coin to decide and his death is decided upon. He breaks his sword, scatters the petals of a rose over it when he has crossed the pieces on the floor, and sprinkles it with holy water! Then he leaves the church to seek obscurity for the rest of his life.

The wildest imagination could not conceive of a man daring to place such action within a church when a service for the dead was going on. If it could it would certainly indicate a depravity of mind and utter disregard for the holiness of sacred things that one could not believe to exist even in this materialistic age! But it has been done, and, while it may be artistic blasphemy to say it, Bataille is the man who has done it!

In the third act Don Juan has become the keeper of an inn. His reputed memoirs, as false to the truth as they were in the roseate glow in which his poet friend's imagination had embellished them, were the sensation of the day. Everyone was reading of the famous love hero. Don Juan read his supposed memoirs with disgust. His silvered hair and advancing age did not take from him that which was the motive of his life. He is trying to win a princess. He tries all his wiles upon her. But she tells him that glory and fame for her are the only things that she could love in a man!

He is surprised when she confesses to him that she prefers an old, almost decrepit general, made famous by many wars, to him, a younger man but only an inn-keeper! Don Juan becomes frantic in his desperation that he is greater than any one, for he is the famous Don Juan! She ridicules him and thinks that he has gone insane as he insists. She calls in the others to share in the ridicule.

The sacrilegious features of the play have so incensed the newspapers of Paris which have Catholic affiliations that they have ignored the piece entirely, after vainly having protested against its production to the police authorities. But the "Camelots du Roi," the young student element of the supporters of the Royalists, have been more active. They have sent their threats of personal violence to Andre Brule, as well as to Bataille. It is hardly possible that any manager will dare to produce the play or a motion picture version of it in America.

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Mlle. Simone Jubert, One of Don Juan's Conquests.



Mlle. Dherlys, Who Appears in the Play, in Her Scant Costume of Pearls.

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